

Thus I have not seen the original Chriss story. Pls. return I wonder how often Post & other subscribers do this.

La. Governor 'Lets Hair Down,' Finds Himself in a Tangle

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It was a case of a politician being shocked by his own statements.

Louisiana Gov. Edwin W. Edwards, who has been caught up since mid-October in protests, building occupations and, finally, death on the campuses of his state's predominantly black colleges, had, in his words, "let my hair down" before three federal officials and two reporters at lunch on Saturday.

"I have no doubt it was a deputy sheriff who fired," the governor said, according to a story by Los Angeles Times reporter Nicholas Chriss.

The governor reportedly said he was going to fire Southern University president Leon Netterville, that he had little confidence in Baton Rouge Sheriff Al Amiss and that he was ready to accede to students' demands except one, "control of the campus."

The candor of the governor's remarks led editors of this newspaper, The Los Angeles Times and, no doubt, of dozens of other members of the Post-Times News Service to begin rearranging the front pages of yesterday's newspapers.

The Post was ready to play Chriss's story as the "lead" of the front page. The Los Angeles Times also had it on page one. That is until Gov. Edwards heard about the story.

He called the Post first, insisting that Chriss had misunderstood. "We were off the record," he said. "He violated my confidence and

a basic rule of journalism. He took advantage of my hospitality."

The governor explained that he had invited Chriss, an unidentified reporter for the Voice of America and three staffers of the Justice Department's Community Relations Service into the Governor's Mansion "for something to eat at my own table."

What followed was frank talk, "letting my hair down," as the governor put it.

The governor said he couldn't have said those things, and "even if I was crazy enough to say them, I wouldn't be crazy enough" to put them on the record.

It was 9:30 p.m. Saturday, a half-hour away from an edition deadline for The Post. I'm an editor with a helluva story in one hand, and in the other, a telephone emitting the nonstop voice of a governor quite certain that his words of earlier in the day would cause him trouble.

"Governor," I said, "wait a

minute. It's not my story. You've got to take your case to the Los Angeles Times."

He did, and all the Post had at 10 p.m. as the deadline passed was a helluva story being denied the public coast to coast.

The Los Angeles Times' editors decided to put a hold on Chriss's story until they could contact him in Baton Rouge, La. A mandatory kill was sent out to subscribers of the Post-Times News Service.

The Los Angeles Times held on for 30 minutes, and like the Post missed an edition, until editors were able to reach Chriss at a Baton Rouge restaurant.

There was no misunderstanding, he told them, and the story was released. Word was sent to the news service subscribers.

No sooner had the word of the Times' editors' decision reached The Post than the governor of Louisiana was back on the phone.

"Governor," I asked, "did you know that Nick Chriss was a reporter?"

"Oh, yes, no question about it," he said. "But it never occurred to me that he would not be intelligent and wise enough to know that letting my hair down with federal mediators . . . It's improper to use that for the basis of a story."

"Did you tell him it was off the record?"

"I didn't tell him it was off the record. I just had confidence in the man."

"What I said . . . they were suppositions . . . observations . . . opinions," Gov. Edwards continued.

"Well, now I might have

Gov. Edwards insisted that throughout his luncheon he was talking frankly for the ears of the federal officials—but not for the reporters or for public print.

"What's going to happen in the wake of that kind of story?" the governor asked. "It's too great a price to pay down here for that kind of story. He (Chriss) had to know."

Reporter Chriss, reached by telephone about 11 p.m. Saturday by The Post, said, "My story stands."

Chriss said he'd had a long talk with Edwards' press secretary Dale Thorne, and in its course, the governor began to back off his denials.

"Well, let the lead stand," Chriss said Thorne told him. "But eliminate the paragraph about firing the president of the school and eliminate the sentence about the sheriff."

"I talked to my desk, and told them to let it stand the way 'it is,'" Chriss said, adding:

"The governor is telling it like it is, and he ought not to be worried about it."

said there was no doubt it could have happened that way," Edwards said. He explained that he had offered several "suppositions — it could have been a deputy sheriff, a student or an exploding bomb."

I asked about his remarks on Sheriff Amiss.

"I didn't say that at all," he replied. "I said he just got elected about six months ago, he hasn't had any formal training in that kind of confrontation. His deputies haven't had any kind of training for this kind of confrontation."